

By Cdr. Peter B. Mersky, USNR (Ret.)

Veronico, Nicholas A. and Marga R. Fritze. *Blue Angels: 50 Years of Precision Flight*. Motorbooks International, 729 Prospect Ave., Osceola, WI 54020. 1996. 128 pp. Ill. \$19.95.

This new effort is typical of several photo-biographies of the *Blue Angels*, but there are a few new and interesting color photos of their early aircraft. However, the lack of people in the photos bothers me. How many shots do we need of unmanned A-4 *Skyhawks* neatly or sequentially lined up on the ramp or of F11F *Tigers* in immaculate formation?

The sidebars add little to the text. For example, the *Blues'* organizational structure is more complicated than indicated here; we don't need to know the F/A-18 *Hornet's* genealogy; and getting your wings can't be described in a half-page box (which contains dated information: NAS Beeville—not Beesville—Texas has closed, and Aviation Officer Candidate School consolidated with Officer Candidate School in 1994).

But if you're a *Blue Angels* devotee, this book brings the story nearly up to date, including the requirements for and selection process of new members, as well as the Marine Corps C-130 transport team.

The text recounts the team's long history, beginning after WW II—the struggles to survive, being recalled to fleet service in Korea, and the various aircraft changes that signified new eras. Personal recollections add to the account.

Sakaïda, Henry. *The Siege of Rabaul*. PHALANX Publishing Co., Ltd., 1051 Marie Ave. W., St. Paul, MN 55118. 1996. 96 pp. Ill. \$16.95.

By mid-1943 it was clear that the war in the Pacific was gradually turning against Japan. As Allied strength grew and that of Japan declined, the island-hopping campaign was just beginning, and within another 18 months it would lead to the home islands and later defeat for the Emperor's forces. A pivotal point at this time was the bastion of Rabaul on the east end of the island of New Britain.

Aircraft from Rabaul had tormented hard-pressed Allied troops on Guadalcanal, and had proven formidable adversaries for the Marine Corps and Navy flight crews at Henderson Field. Yet, as the Solomons were finally secured and the ambitious program of amphibious operations began, Rabaul receded as a threat, and eventually it was bypassed altogether. But even as its role deteriorated, Rabaul still posed a threat with its remaining fighter and bomber squadrons.

Henry Sakaïda has opened another window on what many would consider familiar territory. With his enviable

research capabilities and contact with surviving Japanese flight crews and commanders, he tells the story from both sides, with interviews and comments by Japanese and Allied participants. The text is broken into short chapters filled with nuggets of information, personal experiences and substantial details.

The text is well supported by photos, many from the pilots' collections. Details of daily operations, as well as specific situations, highlight this fine account. One of the important aspects of this book is that the reader sees something of the personalities of the people, particularly the Japanese, who are usually shown as faceless automata, devoid of feeling and purpose other than to obey orders without question.

The fact is well shown that the young aviators from Rabaul did wonder about their mission, did think for themselves and even altered mission objectives if they couldn't accomplish the primary mission. They also showed initiative. Without a dedicated reconnaissance aircraft, the Japanese modified a *Zero* to accommodate an observer in a second seat behind the pilot. Two of these two-seater *Zeros* were built, although only one was used to any extent. The observer could relay real-time information by radio.

This period also saw the first use of guided missiles when a special U.S. Navy task group launched several Interstate TDR drones—small twin-engine pilotless aircraft carrying a 2,000-pound bomb. Initial attacks against Japanese ships and facilities were fairly successful.

The *Siege of Rabaul* also includes details of PBJ *Mitchell* operations and night-fighter missions as well as engagements involving Japanese and American aces. The book is well worth reading.

Milligan, Sean Paul. *Quonset Point Naval Air Station, Gem of the Atlantic*. Arcadia, 137 Olympia Ave., Pawtucket, RI 02861-4209. 1996. 128 pp. Ill. \$16.99.

This labor of love took a long time to reach publication, but the author has put his heart and soul into rounding up a collection of period photos detailing one of only two naval air stations in southern New England. The other, NAS South Weymouth, Mass., is slated to close.

Quonset was a busy station from its opening in July 1941 through the war years and into the mid-1960s, supporting a wide variety of activities in conjunction with the Vietnam War.

The book has little text. Most of the information is in the photos and accompanying captions. People and aircraft from all services recount the life of NAS Quonset Point.

If you spent any time at Quonset, this book belongs in your library. Even if you never saw Rhode Island's NAS, this paperback is recommended.